

C. D. Cooper
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PASTORAL LETTER

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OF THE

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RT. REV. H. POTTER, D.D., D.C.L.,

WITH

THE REPLIES

OF

The Rev. S. H. TYNG, D.D.,

“ E. H. CANFIELD, D.D.,

“ JOHN COTTON SMITH, D.D.,

“ W. A. MUHLENBERG, D.D.

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New-York :

JOHN A. GRAY & GREEN, PRINTERS, 16 & 18 JACOB STREET.

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TO THE

CLERGY OF THE DIOCESE OF NEW-YORK.

REV. AND DEAR BRETHREN :

It is with some reluctance, and after a good deal of reflection, that I yield to the sense of duty which impels me to address to you the following considerations, touching the Law of the Church. While a communication like the present must of necessity be sent to all the Clergy of the Diocese without distinction, yet it is a happiness to believe that there are but few among a large number for whom such suggestions as those now presented can be at all necessary. And if there should be a few Clergymen in the Diocese who are conscious to themselves that there has been something in their official proceedings which may have had some influence in suggesting the propriety and even necessity of these present observations, it is believed that they will be candid enough to recognize and acknowledge these two truths :

First. That the present Bishop of the Diocese has been un-failing in his personal kindness toward themselves—in his manifestations of personal respect and regard ; and

Second. That his administration of the Diocese (whatever may have been its faults in other respects) has not been marked by any disposition on his part to impose needless restraints upon the official conduct of the Clergy, or to interfere in any way without necessity with their freedom of action.

If, on the present occasion, the Bishop steps forth in an unusual way to address his Brethren, it is because he fears that things have occurred in the way of clerical action which are contrary to the Law of the Church, and injurious to its peace and good order ; because he has been again and again appealed to by both Clergymen and Laymen (who are not apt to be busybodies, or

censorious) to do something to check what seems to be a growing evil; and above all, because he hopes that there are those who may have acted hastily, and who, upon a candid and serious review of their obligations and duties, will change their view of what it is right for them to do as Ministers of this Church, and will throw the influence of their judgment and example upon the side of order and unity within their own fold.

Suffer me, then, dear Brethren, in all meekness and charity, to lay before you, for your consideration, some of the principles and laws of the Church which we accepted when we became her ministers, and which, with all the solemnities of an oath, we bound ourselves to observe.

1. Just previous to our Ordination, (when admitted to the Diaconate, and again when advanced to the Priesthood,) a ceremonial which rises above every thing else that we know in life by its awful religious solemnity, we deliberately write and pronounce to the Bishop, the following emphatic declaration: "I do believe the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, and to contain all things necessary to Salvation; and *I do solemnly engage to conform to the Doctrines and Worship of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States.*"

2. Then, in the midst of the service of Ordination, as we stood before the Bishop and before the Holy Table, we were asked:

"Will you then give your faithful diligence always so to minister the Doctrine and Sacraments, and the Discipline of Christ, as the Lord hath commanded, and *as this Church hath received the same*, according to the commandments of God, so that you may teach the people committed to your care and charge with all diligence, to keep and observe the same?"

To which each one of us deliberately replied: "*I will do so, by the help of the Lord.*"

3. Let us now see what are the Doctrines, Discipline, and Worship of this Church, to which, with so much solemnity, we promised conformity at our ordination.

First.—In the Preface to the Ordinal, the Church sets forth her principles and her law in regard to the sacred ministry, in the most clear, formal, and authoritative way. She says: "*It is the ancient and constant order of the Church, that all men diligently reading Holy Scripture and Antient Authors, that from the Apostles' time, there have been these officers and ministers in Christ's Church—Bishops, Priests, and Deacons. Which offices were evermore had in such reverend*

estimation, that no man might presume to execute any of them, except he were first called, tried, examined, and known to have such qualities as are requisite for the same; and also by public prayer, with imposition of hands, were approved and admitted thereunto by lawful authority. And therefore, to the intent that these Orders may be continued, and reverently used and esteemed in this Church, no man shall be accounted or taken to be a lawful Bishop, Priest, or Deacon, in this Church, or suffered to execute any of the said functions, except he be called, tried, examined, and admitted thereunto, according to the form hereafter following, or hath had Episcopal Consecration or Ordination."

Second.—Then the Church proceeds, according to that declaration, to enact, in her very first Canon, that "In this Church, there shall always be three orders in the ministry, viz.: *Bishops, Priests, and Deacons*;" of course Episcopally ordained and consecrated, for

Third.—In the sixth section of her fifth Canon (Title I.) she enacts, that "Candidates, who, not having Episcopal Ordination, have been acknowledged as ordained or licensed ministers in any other denomination of Christians, may, at the expiration of not less than six months from their admission as candidates, *be ordained Deacons on their passing the same examinations as other candidates for Deacons' orders.*" Whence appears the importance which she attaches to Episcopal ordination—for,

Fourth.—In the ninth Canon (Title I.) she provides for receiving a "Deacon or Priest ordained by a Bishop not in communion with this Church," (after due inquiry and examination, and a probation of six months, and a declaration of conformity,) as a minister of this Church, *without reordination.*

Fifth.—And in her eleventh Canon (Title I.) this Church enacts that "No person shall be permitted to officiate in *any congregation* of this Church, without first producing the evidence of his being a *minister thereof*, to the minister, or in case of vacancy or absence, to the Church Wardens, Vestrymen, or Trustees of the congregation."

Having thus provided that none but episcopally ordained Clergymen shall minister in any of her congregations, this Church next prescribes, with the utmost care and precision, the form of worship to which they are to conform.

In her twentieth Canon (Title I.) she ordains, that "every Minister shall, before all sermons and lectures, and on *all other*

occasions of public worship, use the Book of Common Prayer, as the same is or may be established by the authority of the General Convention of this Church; and in performing such service no other prayers shall be used than those prescribed by the said Book."

Finally, in Canon 2, (Title II.,) the Church enumerates the offences for which every Minister shall be liable to be presented, tried, and punished; and among them she mentions "*violation of the Constitution or Canons of this Church, or of the Diocese to which he belongs,*" and orders that, "*on being found guilty, he shall be admonished, suspended, or degraded, according to the Canons of the Diocese in which the trial takes place.*"

The same Canon provides that, "*if a Minister of this Church shall be accused by public rumor,*" of any one of certain enumerated offences, one of them being that "*of violating the Canons,*" "IT SHALL BE THE DUTY OF THE BISHOP TO SEE THAT AN INQUIRY BE INSTITUTED AS TO THE TRUTH OF SUCH PUBLIC RUMOR," and that if the accused be convicted after due process, "*he shall be admonished, suspended, or degraded, as the nature of the case may require.*"

It will be apparent, from the Canon last referred to, that the Bishop is as much under the guidance and control of the Law of the Church, as is any other Clergyman; and that when charges, duly supported, are presented, and even when public rumor, accusing a clergyman, takes a clear and definite form, with reasonable probability of being well founded, the Bishop has little or no discretion, but is bound to proceed "diligently to exercise such discipline as, by the authority of God's Word, and by the order of this Church, is committed to him."

From the preceding review of the Principles and Law of the Church, these particulars plainly appear :

1. The Church makes a fundamental distinction between Ministers Episcopally ordained, and ministers not Episcopally ordained; for when she admits them to serve at her altars, she reordains the latter, but she does not reordain the former.

2. The Church requires of all who minister to her congregations two things: *first*, that they be *Episcopally ordained*, and *second*, that they be Episcopally ordained *ministers of this Church*. Non-Episcopal divines are, therefore, doubly excluded—*first*, because they are not Episcopally ordained; and *second*, because they are not ministers of this Church.

3. The Church clearly excludes ministers and licentiates of non-Episcopal bodies, not only from administering the Sacraments, but also from teaching within her fold, holding them to be incompetent; for she requires them to be regularly admitted as candidates for Holy Orders—to pass a probation of six months—and to submit to full theological examinations; those examinations having special reference to points of difference between the Church and the Body from which the minister comes.

4. The Church, so far from aiming at novelty or variety in her devotional services, is severe in the provision which she makes for securing absolute *uniformity of worship*. She will not allow her children to be disturbed in their solemn acts of worship by the intrusion of novel forms or expressions. She leaves nothing to the fancy or caprice of the officiating minister. If he become lax or unsound in his teaching, the Creeds, the Litany, the Te Deum, the Confession and Absolution, the Prayers and Praises, the offices for Baptism, for Confirmation, for the Holy Communion, for Matrimony, and for the Burial of the Dead in Christ—these will rebuke him, and help to sustain the faith and devotion of the people in spite of his ignorance or unfaithfulness. Nothing can be more clear and absolute than the Law which the Church has ordained and evidently means to enforce. “Every minister,” she says, “shall, *before all Sermons and Lectures, and on all other occasions of Public Worship*, use the Book of Common Prayer as the same is or may be established by the authority of the General Convention of this Church; and in performing such Service, *no other prayers shall be used* than those prescribed by the said book.” The only exception to this rule is the permission given to the Bishop, and only to the Bishop, to set forth temporarily prayers or thanksgivings for certain special and extraordinary occasions.

5. Finally, we have seen that the Church repeatedly and in the most solemn manner, binds the conscience of every minister she ordains, to a strict conformity to her Doctrines, Discipline, and Worship. She holds God to be a God of order and not of confusion. She leaves others to employ their own methods; but within her own fold she will endure no irregularity, no trifling with what upon indubitable evidence she avers to be “the Truth, the whole Truth, and nothing but the Truth” of God.

Surely nothing can be good in itself—nothing can lead to ultimate good which involves a violation of obligations so solemnly

assumed. Disobedience to Laws to which we have given our assent—disobedience to the laws of that Spiritual Household of which we are members, is enough to vitiate any course of action, however, in other respects, it may commend itself to certain amiable feelings of our nature.

Christian unity, based upon sound principles, and obtained by legitimate methods, is, no doubt, a consummation to be devoutly longed for and prayed for. But if, while we please ourselves with beautiful visions of fraternal union, we rush out of our legitimate sphere, and violate the laws of that sphere, we create division in the circle where our first duties are appointed, and our efforts tend to disorder and confusion rather than to peace and harmony.

It is believed that the recent movements, to which I am now referring, will have for their only result considerable disquiet and offence within the Church, and, in the end, a new outbreak of bitterness toward us from without. These movements will speedily come to nothing. The great majority of the Clergy and Laity will strongly disapprove of them; and the Ministers of other religious bodies will not long find it consistent with their self-respect to avail themselves of concessions which can be proffered only by a few, and only through a violation of engagements generally deemed sacred.

Great movements in the ecclesiastical world, like great changes in civil affairs, come more frequently from unexpected openings of Divine Providence, than from any wit, or foresight, or pre-concerted schemes of man. And if we quietly go on doing “our duty in that state of life to which it hath pleased God to call us”—firm in regard to principles and obligations, but kind and charitable toward persons—we may humbly trust that the adorable Head of the Church will, in His own good time and way, restore to us some of those blessings of unity and fraternal communion, the loss of which we so deeply deplore. But when individuals take the cause of unity into their own hands, and initiate proceedings which are repudiated by the great majority of their brethren, which are contrary to the usages and antecedents of the Church, and contrary to the well-established judgment of the Church as to the meaning and intent of her Law; then the result must be, as has been said, not an augmented tendency to union and harmony, but an unusual rising up of disturbance and division. Already we hear of criminations and recriminations among

Brethren. There are those who are offended at what they believe to be violations of the law of the Church—things which they consider as calculated to obscure the principles of the Church, to impair her authority, and to disturb her peace; while there are others who resent such criticism, and fling back upon the objectors charges of bigotry and narrow-mindedness. Nor will the Bishop himself escape this special outbreak of odium and censure. Mild and forbearing as he has ever been toward eccentric persons within the Church, kind and respectful and warm-hearted as he has been in private life toward many ministers and laymen of other religious bodies, he will not be able to put forth a word in support of order and law, however temperate, and however strictly it may be in the line of his bounden duty, without exposing himself to hard thoughts from within the Church, and to bitter denunciations from without.

A claim has been put forth in some quarters that certain novel movements, not having been distinctly arraigned and censured, are therefore to be considered as having obtained authoritative recognition in the Church, and are henceforth to be looked upon as being within the limits of the Church's Law and Practice. Surely no claim can be more utterly unfounded. Not by any means is every act to be held as lawful and right, which is not immediately arraigned and censured. Were such a principle admitted, forbearance, even in little things, would cease to be a virtue in a Bishop. There is little danger that an idea so very erroneous will ever mislead many clergymen or laymen of the Church.

And in this connection I beg to express the hope that those of my Brethren who have felt themselves aggrieved by practices at variance, as they believe, with the law and usages of the Church, will not, at least at present, make those practices the subject of a formal complaint. It is believed that, after an appeal like the present, (not now to speak of private communications, in some instances previously made,) to the good sense and right feeling of the Diocese, those irregularities may be safely left to such restraint and correction as they will unquestionably receive from the general judgment of the Church. They will be limited to a very narrow circle, and they will be impotent and fugitive, as every thing must be impotent and fugitive, which is in the nature of a departure from a Polity so reasonable and so well settled as is ours.

It is with a good deal of regret that I have observed the kind of argument employed in justification of irregularities, some of which seem to have been deliberately introduced, as the commencement of a new system designed to be continued. Within a year, two exceptional services have been held in Churches in this city—one of them with the cordial approval, the other with the bare assent, of the Bishop. I refer to a service celebrated by a Priest of the Oriental Church in Trinity Chapel, on the Anniversary of the Accession of the Emperor of Russia to the throne; and to a service held by a non-Episcopal divine, in a foreign tongue, under very peculiar circumstances, in the Church of the Holy Communion. In both cases the services were for congregations totally distinct from those of the Church. The Church was in no way responsible for the character of those services, except as permission had been given to hold them at a time when the Churches were not required for the use of the ordinary congregation. There was no official intermingling of services by ministers, some of whom were of this Church, and some not. In neither case was the service likely to be repeated.

• The Priest of the Oriental Church comes to this country to minister to a very few members of his Church, thinly scattered all the way from Maine to Louisiana. For twenty or thirty years the children have remained unbaptized, and the people have been deprived of the Holy Eucharist. The Church has not a single house of worship within these States. It has been repeatedly recognized by the Bishops of this Church as a sister-Church. It has never excommunicated us, nor cursed us. It has never bound upon the consciences of its people the errors and corruptions of the middle ages. The apostolicity of its ministry is unquestionable. The Priest is allowed to hold his services in a small retired room in an edifice devoted to Parish schools in the rear of St. John's Chapel. But a day is approaching, which is one of special interest to the whole Russian Empire, and to the Church in that Empire, as it is dedicated to the honor of her chief civil ruler—a ruler who has distinguished himself by the most beneficent reforms, and who, in common with all his people, has won our esteem by sympathy with us, not only heretofore, but in a marked manner in our late grievous trials. It seems but decent and reasonable that the services for that *national day* should be held in a place where they can be conducted with dignity, and be attended without inconvenience.

Under such circumstances, and without assuming any responsibility with regard to the peculiar features of the services to be celebrated, permission is given by the Rector and by the Bishop to that Priest of a sister-Church to hold them in the Chapel at a time when it is not required for the use of the ordinary congregation.

In regard to the peculiar circumstances of the other case, it is unnecessary to speak. Certainly, the specious plea urged on that occasion will never be admitted again by the present Bishop. The case was wholly exceptional, beginning and ending with itself. Let it be granted that the permission to hold that service was an irregularity; let the Bishop be duly censured. He is entirely content to have it so; but he is not content that two such cases should be made a cover for the introduction of usages which are apparently designed to be, if possible, continued, that they may modify, if not revolutionize, the existing system of the Church—usages which are at variance with her principles and with her well-settled practice.

In the cases of irregularity which have been so widely complained of, ministers of this Church are understood to have united with ministers of non-Episcopal bodies in holding services in Churches of this Diocese; or else ministers of this Church went to non-Episcopal places of worship and preached, without the due performance of the devotional services enjoined by the law of the Church. There seemed to be an express design to unite with the ministers of other bodies in the same services. There could be no plea on either side that there was any lack of places of worship suited to their respective needs, and expressly adapted to their ordinary habits of devotion.

It has been claimed that the congregations ministered to on these occasions by non-Episcopal divines in Episcopal churches were not, in the canonical sense, "congregations of this Church." The fact that a general invitation was given to members of different religious bodies to assemble in one of our churches for a particular purpose, and unite with so many members of that congregation, and of others of our congregations, as might incline to be present, was alleged to make the assemblage something different from what is spoken of in the Canon as a "congregation of this Church." But it is believed that no unbiased member of our communion could go into one of our churches, and find a congregation composed largely of our own people, composed largely of

the members of that Parish, and after the celebration of our worship with more or less of regularity, see a Presbyterian divine ascend the pulpit to preach, without a strong feeling that it was a gross innovation, and a flagrant violation of the spirit and intent of our law; and of the principles of our Church, as interpreted by the general practice and the unvarying judgment of the great body of our divines, both English and American. And if it was proclaimed, in the time of such service, that the novel union was a deliberate arrangement, was a preconcerted tentative effort, designed to inaugurate a course of similar services, which would be a recognition of a non-Episcopal ministry, such notice would hardly lessen the severity of the judgment that would be pronounced against the whole proceeding.

In conclusion—for it is unnecessary to extend these observations—I beg to remind such of my Brethren as may feel themselves more particularly concerned in the present communication, that the question now under consideration is not a question of respect for Christians of this or that name, or of esteem for the religious character of individual ministers of this or that denomination. Much less is it a question as to whether we, as individuals, approve in our private judgment of every particular restriction contained in the Law of the Church. While we remain in the Church, we must accept and consider ourselves as bound by the Principles and Law of the Church, just as they are. Should they be changed hereafter—which is not probable—then our obligations might be different from what they are now. But, until then, it is believed that every considerate and conscientious minister of this Church will feel, upon a calm and candid review of the whole subject, that his line of duty is very simple and very plain—to adhere, most scrupulously, without qualification and without reserve, to the Principles and Law of the Church, as he finds them established, and as they have been interpreted (not by individuals, but) by the great body of Bishops, Clergy, and People, in their practice and in their authoritative declarations. The mere promptings of sentiment and self-will which disregard the paramount obligations of obedience, can never be really useful—can never be entitled to our respect. Is it too much to say that they can never be innocent?

The Church, in her statement of principles and in her law, makes it as clear as any truth ever can be made, that she means to erect, and has erected, an effectual barrier between all within

her fold, and the official action of ministers of non-Episcopal bodies. For many of those ministers, as individuals, I feel great respect and regard. I honor them for their talents and for their piety. With not a few of them I have lived in private life in habits of most friendly intercourse. But I strongly approve of the Principles and Law of the Church. I consider myself bound by her authority, having given my assent to it when I became one of her ministers; and in my official capacity, I know of no ministry outside of her fold.

DEAR BRETHREN: I close as I began. I believe that every one of the few Clergy who may think themselves touched by this present appeal, will feel assured in their own minds, from all that they have seen and known of their Bishop, that he cherishes for them a sincere respect—a most affectionate regard. That regard is entirely unchanged. Praying God to pour out his best blessings upon the Ministry and upon the whole Church, I remain, as ever, your faithful Brother in Christ,

HORATIO POTTER,

Bishop of New-York.

NEW-YORK, *May* 19, 1865.

